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Supervisors Act to Examine and Reform Sheriffs Department

The Los Angeles Board of Supervisors today took strong action to bring greater oversight and accountability to the Sheriff's Department, unanimously voting to establish a seven-member citizens' commission to investigate allegations of abuse and corruption.

The commission would be tasked with reviewing the nature, depth and cause of inappropriate uses of force by deputies in the County jails and to return to the Board with recommendations for reforms.

The motion for a commission, sponsored jointly by Supervisors Zev Yaroslavsky and Mark Ridley-Thomas, charges the new commission with presenting its findings within 120 days of its first meeting.

In second unanimous vote, the Board also approved on a motion by Supervisor Gloria Molina, to implement existing recommendations by Special Counsel Merrick Bobb and the Office of Independent Review. The recommendations include but are not limited to: the installation of surveillance cameras at the Men's Central Jail, the Inmate Reception center and the Twin Towers, elimination of steel-toed shoes, a revision of department policy to forbid striking inmates on the head and regular rotation of jail deputies between floors at the Men's Central Jail and to other facilities at no less than six-month intervals.

The Board also approved an amendment by Supervisor Ridley-Thomas to require the Chief Executive Office, the Internal Services Department and County Counsel to work with the Sheriff to facilitate implementation of the existing recommendations.

“These two motions are complementary,” Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said. “They are not in conflict and nor are they contradictory. Supervisor Molina’s motion calls for important and necessary steps to be made immediately, but the commission has a broader charge.

“It will not only examine past practices, it will offer the Board a roadmap to use as we move forward with reforms,” the Supervisor said.

Tuesday’s action by the board comes after report released last week by the Sheriff’s Department Office of Independent Review found that a code of silence among deputies has shielded abusive jailers and that those who break that code are subject to harassment by colleagues. The report found that eight deputies failed to report mistreatment of an inmate that was recorded on video. In another case, a deputy who reported wrongdoing received threatening phone calls, the report said.

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